

PUBLIC HEARING of the Town Council held Thursday, May 29, 2007 at 7:05 P.M. in the auditorium of the Burrillville High School, 425 East Avenue, Harrisville, for and within the Town of Burrillville.

PRESENT: Council President Nancy F. Binns, Councilors Wallace F. Lees, Kevin M. Blais, Margaret L. Dudley, John M. Karmozyn Jr., and Norman C. Mainville.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilor Cynthia L. Roe was excused due to family illness.

OTHERS PRESENT:

Burrillville School Committee: Chairman Raymond J. Trinque; Members Dorothy A. Cardon, Joan Cote, Paul J. Couture, Mary Margaret Karmozyn, and Peter Lambert.

Burrillville Budget Board: Chairman Arthur R. Hurley; Member Debra Stockwell.

Burrillville School Department: Steven Welford, Superintendent of Schools; Robin Kimatian, Supervisor of Business Affairs.

Relative to discussing the School Budget

NOTE: The public hearing was duly advertised in the Woonsocket Call on May 8, 12, and 14, 2008.

1. Comments from the Budget Board

Arthur R. Hurley, Chairman of the Burrillville Budget Board, reviewed issues related to the School Department Budget discussed during Budget Board deliberations. He referenced progress toward a meaningful maintenance program at School properties and discussed the importance of the program. Mr. Hurley reviewed the Budget Board's concern with School Department unfunded liabilities. Mr. Hurley suggested that the salary step system must continue to be addressed and discussed connections between student test scores and teachers' salaries.

2. Comments from Raymond Trinque, Chair, Burrillville School Committee

Raymond J. Trinque, Chairman of the Burrillville School Committee, reviewed the process of developing the FY2009 School Department budget, the limitations on the budget, and the long-term plan for addressing school matters. He commended the administration for their thoughtful approach to the budget. Mr. Trinque said that, despite a difficult economy, the School Department could succeed with the proposed budget. Mr. Trinque commented on the irrelevance of salary lists.

Mr. Trinque referenced Stemming the Tide: A Study of Students

Dropouts, which had been distributed and a copy of which is on file with the record of the hearing. Mr. Trinque identified the report as the foundation for future achievement. Mr. Trinque quoted from the study, acknowledged that the dropout rate is too high, and discussed the plan to correct the problem.

3. Comments from Steven Welford, Superintendent of the Burrillville School Department

Steven Welford, Superintendent of Schools, commented on the challenges of the current year, on the effort to preserve the many School Department successes, and the need to address critical issues. Mr. Welford presented details of the School Department's plan. An outline of the Superintendent's presentation is on file with the record of the public hearing.

In discussing educational initiatives, Mr. Welford echoed Mr. Trinque's comments related to the dropout rate, expanding upon some causes and outlined plans to address the problem. Mr. Welford explained the impact of state and federal mandates. He discussed the need to maintain diploma-granting approval, develop student achievement data, and improve reading instruction. Mr. Welford detailed issues affecting the budget, steps taken to address budget issues, and reviewed unresolved matters. Mr. Welford cautioned that further reductions in state aid would impact the ability to adhere to the proposed budget.

Mr. Welford summarized the budget development process, the balance of education and fiscal needs of the entire town. He discussed increasing students' needs, costs, and state requirements. Mr. Welford suggested that increasing state requirements would eventually become unaffordable to every community, at which point the state might recognize that fundamental institutional change is necessary.

Councilor John M. Karmozyn, Jr. asked Mr. Welford about the status of discussions with the Northern Rhode Island Collaborative relative to disbursement of funds. Mr. Welford briefly reviewed the dispute, indicating that more information would be available in June.

Councilor John M. Karmozyn, Jr. asked whether the proposal to focus on the reading program would use reading experts already in the school system, as well as outside specialists. Mr. Welford said that outside advisors would work with school department's reading experts to develop the program.

Councilor Kevin M. Blais recalled earlier discussions of the financial impact a large influx of students might have on the School Department. Councilor Blais asked whether a substantial decrease in the number of dropouts would have a similar impact. Steven Welford, Superintendent of Schools, explained how and why the impact would be different and how the School Department could work with and

accommodate all students who stay in the system.

Councilor Kevin M. Blais asked whether the budget amounts for fuel were realistic. Mr. Welford explained the process of establishing a budget amount and indicated that the budgeted amounts are the School Department's best estimates. The matter was discussed.

Councilor Kevin M. Blais asked about improvements in preventive maintenance and building upkeep during the past year. Steven Welford, Superintendent of Schools, discussed the successful program that had been implemented.

Arthur R. Hurley, Budget Board Chairman, asked whether an adult education program could be implemented to increase revenues. Mr. Welford discussed credit recovery plans for evening and on-line programs. While these programs might enhance revenues, the primary intention is to address the dropout situation. Programs for adult education, addressing the dropout issue, offering General Educational Development (GED) testing, and keeping students in schools were discussed.

Raymond J. Trinque, Chairman of the School Committee, discussed areas the School Department uses to enhance revenues, such as revolving funds and self-sufficient programs. Mr. Trinque suggested that the state should consider allowing users' fees for some services, such as athletics and transportation.

Councilor Norman C. Mainville commended Steven Welford, the school department staff and personnel on a job well done.

Susan Kent asked whether School Committees statewide could join and refuse to implement state mandates. Raymond J. Trinque, Chairman of the School Committee, suggested that refusing state mandates would impact state aid. Mr. Trinque discussed proposed legislation to address some issues, which has been unsuccessful to date.

Susan Kent suggested a volunteer mentoring program to assist students who are struggling. Steven Welford, Superintendent of Schools, discussed past success of the current mentoring program and noted that the program has weakened because the coordinator has been unable to continue with the program.

Michael C. Wood, Town Manager, asked the amount of money budgeted for unemployment related to staff reductions. Stephen Welford, Superintendent of Schools, said that \$70,000 was budgeted. He indicated that the amount did not include payouts for unfunded liabilities such as sick leave, vacation, etc., because they do not apply to staff who are laid-off, only to those who retire. Mr. Welford said that \$60,000 was budgeted for sick leave buy-back.

4. Comments from Michael C. Wood, Town Manager

Michael C. Wood, Town Manager, said that the numbers related to the tax cap are the driving force in the budget proposal. Mr. Wood said that the budget modifications provide a \$100,000 float to accommodate possible changes, such as possible reductions in state aid. Mr. Wood reviewed reductions in department requests and discussed the necessity of working together to develop a solution.

5. Public Comment:

Note: Persons who wish to address the Council shall state their name and address

Louise Phelan of Glendale voiced concern that teachers are blamed for poor student achievement. Ms. Phelan suggested that state law related to discipline has resulted in teachers having to focus on behavior issues rather than education. Ms. Phelan suggested that the situation results in intelligent students becoming bored and dropping out of school.

Dorothy Cardon, School Committee member, focused on the accomplishments of some students. Ms. Cardon referenced the program of The Rhode Island Middle Level Educators and the New England League of Middle School 9th Annual Scholarship Leader Awards Banquet. Ms. Cardon noted that two of the honorees were Burrillville Middle School students. Ms. Cardon listed the criteria for the award. Ms. Cardon emphasized that good things are happening in

the Burrillville School District.

6. VOTED to close the public hearing.

Motion by Councilor Norman C. Mainville. Seconded by Councilor Margaret L. Dudley. The vote was unanimous by the six members present. Voting in favor of the motion were Council President Nancy F. Binns and Councilors Wallace F. Lees, Kevin M. Blais, Margaret L. Dudley, John M. Karmozyn Jr., and Norman C. Mainville. Councilor Cynthia L. Roe was excused.

7. Town Council deliberation

Council President Nancy F. Binns commended the work of the School Committee. President Binns acknowledged the joint effort of the School Committee, School Administration, Town Council, and Town Administration to make education a priority. She reflected on a difficult year past and allowed that the coming year could be more difficult. Council President Binns discussed her participation in the scholarship program and recognized the achievements of the students.

8. VOTED to adjourn at 8:17 P.M.

Motion by Councilor Margaret L. Dudley. Seconded by Councilor Norman C. Mainville. The vote was unanimous by the six members

present. Voting in favor of the motion were Council President Nancy F. Binns and Councilors Wallace F. Lees, Kevin M. Blais, Margaret L. Dudley, John M. Karmozyn Jr., and Norman C. Mainville. Councilor Cynthia L. Roe was excused.

The hearing was taped. The tape is on file with the record of the hearing.

Louise R. Phaneuf, Town Clerk